The Last White Tiger
By Roger E Bissell Jr

He was born from a moment of human curiosity.

His mother, pregnant and unwisely enchanted by a white tiger cub at a petting zoo, ignored every posted warning. The cub's playful claws and teeth left scratches along her arms, and the doctors later argued endlessly about what happened next. Some claimed her fear imprinted itself onto the child. Others insisted infection had altered his development. A few whispered about curses. No one agreed, and no one stayed long enough to find out.

His parents fled to American Samoa, hoping distance would hide whatever he was becoming. They taught him to fish, to hunt, to stay out of sight. They told him white tigers had been hunted to extinction for their rare fur, and that anything rare in the human world was never safe. When he reached his early teens, they left him behind — whether out of fear, shame, or exhaustion, he never knew.

Hunger eventually drove him toward a nearby village. He expected shouting, weapons, panic. Instead, an elderly woman ran to him, wrapped him in a blanket, and hurried him back toward the trees. Her English was broken, but her meaning was clear: *"You no be here. Thy hurt you. Caught. You no more come. I get you eat."*

He remembered her wrinkles more than her words — the soft map of a long life etched into her face. For years she brought food to the jungle's edge, never stepping too far in, never asking him to step out. She protected him by keeping him hidden, and he learned to survive because she cared enough to try.

He never forgot her kindness.

Years later, when a plane bound for Australia crashed near his jungle, he found a teenage girl among the wreckage — injured, terrified, and alone. He carried her through the trees, guiding her toward the nearest town. At the edge of the fields he stopped, knowing what crossing that line would cost him.

"Tell them you alone survived," he said. "Please don't tell them about me. I know what will happen if they hear."

She promised.

But someone in the fields caught a glimpse of him — a pale, upright shape moving through the trees. A rumor was born before the girl even reached the first house.

Authorities questioned her gently at first, then sharply. She insisted it was a man, a recluse, someone who didn't want to be bothered. When they pressed her, she snapped — furious that they seemed more interested in a "creature" than in helping her.

Search parties combed the jungle. They found nothing.

Reporters arrived, hungry for a story. The authorities quietly decided not to mention the glimpse, not to feed outsiders' curiosity, not to invite hunters or collectors into their country. The girl kept her promise, though it cost her the truth. And somewhere beyond the edge of town, the white tiger watched the rescue efforts and wondered whether saving her had been a terrible mistake — or the first good choice he had made in a very long time.

He wasn't hiding because he was ashamed of what he was.

He was hiding because the world wasn't ready to let him be what he was.

And yet, he had saved her anyway.